

Weeping Cloud

Introduction:

ACT 1:

- Weeping Clouds Theme song played on a flute sound. Stage lights come up slowly.
- Clap sticks plays for 1 minute
- Dancers emerge from different directions in the audience and move towards the campfire where they will sit until the end of production.

(Recording Isabel)

"We are the Paakantji people from the Darling River. And it wasn't called the Darling River in the first place, the people called it the Paaka, the white man changed it to the Darling, white man that came this way...." (Fade) (Fade in "The white man moved our Aboriginal people off the land and river, they lived all along this river my Paakantji people, my tribal people, our ancestors, like you are and they lived up and down the river, they used to be in here yeah, this is our part of the land. And From way up top right through to where the two rivers meet down in Wentworth.. "(Fade)

ACT 2:

Narrator:

"I was born in Pooncarie on the 31 August 1930. My mother was aboriginal and my father was aboriginal. But I grew up with my mother and stepfather. I have 5 brothers and 4 sisters.

The white people built houses, just two room houses, with cemented floors on the river. Old Menindee Mission they called it. It was on the river, 9 miles up the river on the other side. That's where I lived.

Isabel
Traditional
Chor
Isobel

John
John
John

Have
Best
Is
Is

My childhood growing up in Menindee was a happy one.

We played our game... we used to slide down the river and swim. We used to make mud pies and things while the old people were fishing, we used to stay away from them, but we had to be in their sight. (Paaka song)

I had friends; mainly the ones were my own cousins, the girl cousins. We played and made up games. We used to dress those little pegs. I don't know if you can still buy them now but we used to cut out little bits of material and make little dresses out of them and pants and things like that and then play with them ~~just~~ in the clay pans at the back of my step aunt's place. I was a dressmaker even then.

Out near there on a little rise we was wanting a feed of maathi, the white man called it snotty gobbles, but the Paakantyi people like me we called them maathi. They're yellow and orange and really dark and they're really nice to eat. So me being the eldest, I was about two years older than the others ^{anyway} and I got up on this tree and they passed me the tomahawk. I was starting to cut the clumps down so they could pick them up and have a feed. Well, I slipped and fell and nearly knocked myself out. My head was going round and round and my face was all scratched, my arms and legs too. They didn't know what to do. I was trying to tell them 'throw water on me'! So anyway one of my sisters did that and some of the water got in my mouth so it helped me, but I really thought that it was going to be the end of me!

They managed to get me home. I don't remember going to the nursing service, it was the treatment room then, where the manager's wife used to sit, I don't remember going there.

ACT3:

Narrator:

I was twelve.

My Mum and stepdad they were away picking grapes and I was left with my cousins.

They took me to the courthouse. I don't know why.

They said I had no Father.

I cried, 'I do I do'!

But they said he didn't matter — he wasn't my real dad.

They said I had to go way.

The mission manager and his wife wanted to take me.

But I chose the nuns. (River of love)

I chose the nuns because mum wanted me and my other sister Edith to be put into a convent, to grow up to be decent human beings, to be ladies. We went to church and that. We were christened and had our first holy communion and got confirmed as a soldier of Christ and everything.

I wanted to go, I think. I wanted to go because I used to like the nuns.

So they took me, to Carrington in South Australia. I was there for nearly a year.

But gee, I really missed my people. (chorus)

I really missed my people, my place and the river of my ancestors.

I felt it. I used to sob for nearly a week. The nun, the one who was in charge, she said to me,
"Isabel everyone is feeling it for you. Love you know, if you're not happy with the girls, I will have to get in touch with the authorities, but you know you might have to go down to Sydney and you won't be with your own Kind".

Well that one woke me up! I said no way, I don't want to go down there! I want to be with my own kind. So I really woke up. I got used to it then.

I got used to the girls and the nuns and that.

They taught me everything I know.

ACT 4:

Narrator:

The nuns took me to Melville Island. That's above Darwin. There's two Islands together. They are the Tiwi islands, Bathurst and Melville.

I travelled there with the Melville Island girls. The nuns had those ~~other~~ ^{because} girls; their mothers couldn't look after them in the war so the nuns looked after them. Those girls were my friends. I grew up with them.

We travelled from Bathurst between the two Islands and then we went up to Garden point Melville Island. That's where I stayed with all my friends.

After school

^ They only taught up to grade 7 and after school we had to do sewing, mending, washing, taking care of little babies, feeding them looking after them and all that. (Cleaning routine)

The nuns taught me to cook and to sew. They taught me to be a dressmaker. And I taught the nuns to swim.

They used to take us out camping so we could practice cultural things. But we got used to get up to mischief too!

We used to sit on this big log near the toilets. We didn't have the press buttons like we do now, just the holes and the seats.

Anyway we used to sit down there breaking bottles to shave our legs, yeah, taking the hair of our legs with broken bottles because we didn't have any blades. *back then*

One of the girls used to go up the tree with a big tin and she would get the nuts.

We would all be out watching to see where the nuns were you see, just to let her know if she had better get down. Then we would run away to the toilet if they came.

She's gone now that girl. God love her, her name was Anna.

She was so funny, she was, ... but she always used to get us into trouble.

I enjoyed it up there. I really loved it on the island.

I was treated like family. Because we were taken up there, they sort of adopted us, so they took really good care of us.

But gee,

I really missed my people. (Ngamaka)

I really missed my place and the river of my ancestors.

Then I got married.

ACT 5:

Narrator:

My husband was a lovely man named Fredrick Joseph Bennett and I loved him.

You will never find men like him in this world, I don't think anyway.

My husband used to make boats. He used to make his own boats. He was a 'Jack of all trades.' The only thing he couldn't do was fly a plane! I had seven children with him.

I spent ten years on the island and I spent ten years, it might even be eleven years in Darwin.

I done sewing in Darwin, ^{had} I bought my own sewing machine — the singer. My husband bought that from Jolly's and I still remember the bloke he bought it from at the shop.

I used to make shorts and shirts and that for sports and things. I made bridesmaid dresses, bar girls' dresses, I made all sorts of things.

I used to make the things the priests wear, they were made in silk and cotton, the things they throw over, I made them with the nun. Because I was the only one who could work with silk.

I worked as a dressmaker. I made clothes for men women and children but the highlight was making a cloak to be worn by Pope John Paul II during his Australian visit.

I had a good life with my family. It was hard but we managed.

Then there was a car accident. My lovely man passed away in 1965. (Funeral song)

It was all empty. So I didn't want to stay around.

I really missed my people.

I really missed my place and the river of my ancestors.

ACT 6:

Narrator:

My longing grew for my country and my people.
I missed the river. I have got to be where the water is I
have got to be, this is my park of my land, my ancestors...

I had to give this to my children before it was too late.

You know my family are knitted in so close, like a cap,
knitted in. They're all I have got, they're my children.
They're family, they have to see their family. They had
never met my mum or my grandmother.

There was a feeling of excitement but also a feeling of
loss.

I had to leave my other people behind this time. Those
who had been with me for so long, those lovely kids who
called me 'mummy,' 'Nanny' or 'Nan'.

My friends didn't want me to come back. They wanted me
to stay, but I said no, my children have never seen my
family and my husband had never seen them. ~~But~~ if I said I
have to take my children home.

We flew back, me and my children.

I had to do it for my children. They needed to know my
story.

They needed to be with the river of my ancestors.

They needed to be in my ancient country.

So we all came home.

Music Starts

I never questioned my mum about what happened or
anything, because we weren't allowed to sort of ask
things, but she did say to me, "daughter I am glad that you
went away because you grew up to be lovely and nice you

know and looked after your family and everything like that."

Yeah, I stuck by my children, I wasn't going to leave them for anyone. I just kept them. I wanted them near me. I mean, I brought them into the world and they're mine, so I just kept them and looked after them and they're still all around me yet. I have got a home here starting right on the banks of the Darling River.

(Finale song)

The days that have no cost
And time is somewhat forever lost
Life is somehow forgotten
And I am longing for that loss

Beautiful space tied with fences
And a yard free without its defences
An ancient country
That enhances my senses

ACT 7:

Isabel's last words: Recording

"My advice to the younger generation now is to realise that they have more in life now, and to really appreciate it and they could be anything now, with their education, they could be doctors, they could be anything, could be teachers, they could be pilots, they could be joining the air Force, the army whatever, they can do anything. The kids, they could be dressmaking, like the girls and that, they could be cooks, even the boys, they could be anything now because they had got all the opportunity, we never had that." (Fade out)

*As I look back
There's a place
A parched plain
A dream keeper*